

Doubles and Twins

A New Approach to Contemporary Studio Photography in West Africa

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African studio portraiture is not exclusive to renowned photographers such as Malians Seydou Keita or Malick Sidibe. Many lesser-known photographers compose pictures responding to their customers' desires and arousing their imaginations. If we must be aware of cultural differences, we can nevertheless also notice great similarities in many West African countries. In studio windows, photographs of two similar or identical figures are often displayed. Widespread for several decades, more than mere entertainment or a passing fad, and suggesting links with cultural meanings, these double portraits are an artistic phenomenon worthy of an historical art analysis.

DOUBLE PORTRAITS IN AFRICAN PHOTOGRAPHY

Though acknowledged to some extent by anthropologists and historians (cf. Houlberg 1973, Sprague 1978, Vogel 1991, Oguibé 1996, Werner 1996, Behrend and Wendl 1997, 1998, Buckley 2000, and Nimis 2003), research on West Africa studio photography has never approached double portraits in photography as a specific aesthetic production. The photographic works can be situated within a more comprehensive history of double portraits in Europe and Africa and in a history of African sculpture and photography, and also contextualized through a collective imagery inspired by myths and practices related to twinning—in other words, these portraits can be analyzed in regard to their contexts of both production and reception. This study is based on a collection of 300 photographs dating from the 1970s up to the present day collected from eighty photographers in four sub-Saharan francophone countries (Togo, Benin, Burkina Faso, and Mali)¹ as I journeyed from the coast to the interior, following the route taken by photography itself as it spread throughout the continent. In addition to the photographs, I also interviewed studio customers, locals, and people involved in the cultural life of the places visited.

Double portraits depict two figures, either similar or identical. In the case of similar figures, an attempt is made to create a twin-like resemblance between two different people by using identical clothing, attitudes, and poses. I will call these portraits paired-figure portraits (Figs. 1–11). When the figures are identical, the portrait of one person has been reproduced twice on the same print: either symmetrically or in juxtaposition, as in duplicated portraits (Figs. 13–17); reflected, as in mirror portraits (Fig.





18); or in two different poses, as in double-exposure portraits (Figs. 19–20). These categories are exemplified in the works of four photographers representative of my study sample: El Hadj Tidiani Shitou (1933–2000), Studio Photo Kodak in Mopti, Mali; Ibrahim Sanlé Sory (b. 1948), Studio Volta Photo in Bobo Dioulasso, Burkina Faso; Michel Houankanrin (b. 1954), Studio Zoom Service in Cotonou, Benin; and Koda C. Labara (b. 1977), Studio Image Plus in Lomé, Togo.

Double portraits are popular among the West African photographers I have met, and most of them are familiar with the conventions of studio portraiture as well as techniques of doubling (they often own the same kind of studio, and even their settings and props are often similar). On one hand, paired-figure portraits occur frequently, and have done so since the beginning of studio photography in Africa, because they do not require any special technique and because people usually do not go alone to the studio. On the other hand, it can be estimated that double, duplicate, and mirror portraits represent only 10% to 20% of all photograph production, given the studios that do not make them and the studio windows where they are displayed as commercial proposals. I observed the same percentage in unsold stocks of photos and personal archives of photographers and clients. The percentage of this group of portraits is due to several factors. Photographers are aware of double exposures and duplicated portraits but some of them do not know how to do them. Some West African towns and villages are far from the trade routes along which artistic ideas, like these portraits, travel. These types of portraits can go out of fashion—without disappearing altogether—in countries where photography and its commercial artifices has been present for a long time, particularly in Benin and in Togo. But they are frequently seen in the more isolated countries like Burkina and Mali. The percent-

(continued on p.70)

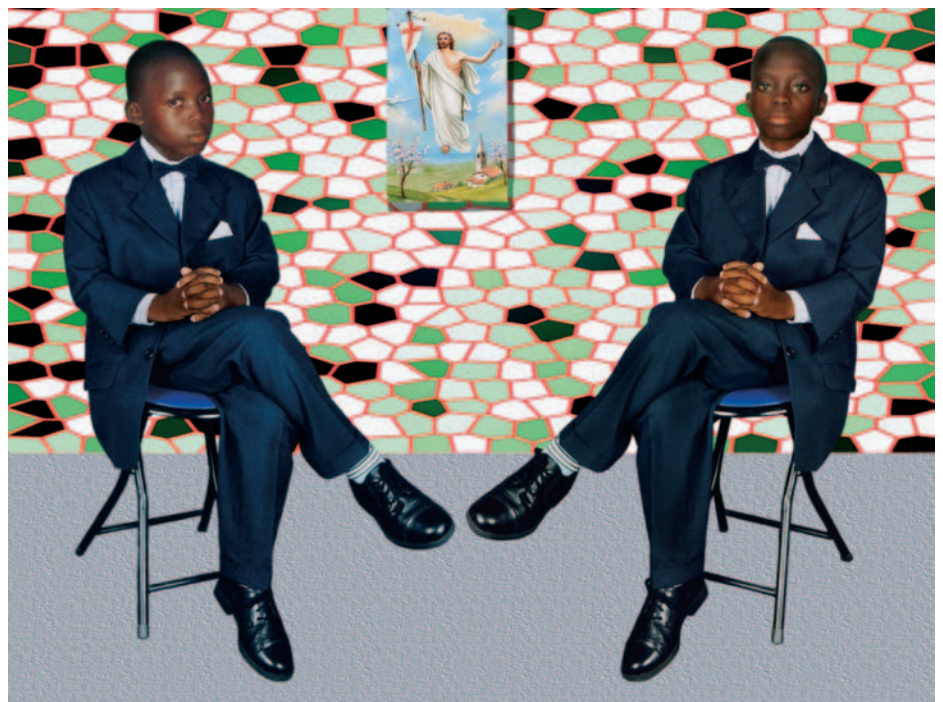
(opposite page)

1 Ibrahim Sanlé Sory
Twins (1985) Bobo Dioulasso
Silver print, 8.5cm x 12.5cm (3½" x 5")
Private collection

(this page)

2 Koda C. Labara
My Closest Friend (2006) Lomé
Color print, 10.5cm x 14.5cm (4¼" x 5¾")
Private collection

3 Michel Houankanrin
Communicants (2004) Cotonou
Numeric print
Collection of the artist





4 Ibrahim Sanlé Sory
Co-wives (1984) Bovo Diloulasso
 B&W negative film, 6cm x 6cm (2½" x 2½")
 Private collection

5 Tidjian Shitou
Two Friends (Peul et Bozo) (1978) Mopti
 B&W negative film, 6cm x 6cm (2½" x 2½")
 Private collection

6 Tidjian Shitou
Circumcised Boys and a Friend (1989) Mopti
 B&W negative film, 6cm x 6cm (2½" x 2½")
 Private collection

7 Tidjian Shitou
Untitled (1989) Mopti
 B&W negative film, 6cm x 6cm (2½" x 2½")
 Private collection





8 Ibrahim Sanlé Sory
Untitled (1972) Bobo Dioulasso
 B&W negative film, 6cm x 6cm (2½" x 2½")
 Private collection

9 Tidjian Shitou
Untitled (1984) Mopti
 B&W negative film, 6cm x 6cm (2½" x 2½")
 Private collection



10 Ibrahim Sanlé Sory
Tabaski (1984) Bobo Dioulasso
 B&W negative film, 6cm x 6cm (2½" x 2½")
 Private collection

11 Tidjian Shitou
Two Friends Peul and et Bozo (1981) Mopti
 B&W negative film, 6cm x 6cm (2½" x 2½")
 Private collection





(continued from p.67)

age can depend on the customers' feelings about modernity. For some of them modernity is epitomized by portraits emphasizing uniqueness of a single portrait (double exposures are seen as too old-fashioned), for others by complex images, reflecting the current multiplicity of individuals, in which one appears duplicated. Nevertheless we must avoid thinking in dichotomies like modern/archaic, towns/villages, south/north. Things are not so simple and I heard diversified and mixed thoughts everywhere. Nonetheless, all kinds of double portraits are considered modern and pleasant images, especially when they are in color.

DOUBLE-PORTRAITS OR TWIN-PORTRAITS?

Closer examination of paired-figure portraits brings to light a whole range of stereotyped pictures in which poses, clothing, accessories, and symmetric composition display a formal and symbolic double. Clients never go to a studio in twos by chance. They may be brought together by special occasions, such as public celebrations (mainly religious, such as Tabaski and Christmas) or private ones (baptism; *rites de passage* such as Christian communions, Islamic circumcisions, and endogenous religious rites; weddings; funerals; reunions), for which they wear identical clothes, a common tradition in the four countries. Different types of relations exist between the two sitters, sometimes familial but also affective, intimate, or social relationships. Whatever the nature of their relationship, it has been created for and occasioned by the picture, and therefore transcends the existing ones. Thus, for instance, co-wives who do not necessarily live in harmony may nevertheless appear united in the picture (Fig. 4).

These different types of relationship have been acknowledged by many anthropological studies, and they can be daily observed. References are too numerous to be exhaustively cited in the pres-

(this page)

12 Two cousins and close friends (2003) Mopti. Photograph by the author in Tidjani and Ibrahim Shitou's Studio Photo Kodak

(opposite page, l-r, top-bottom)

13 Tidjani Shitou

Foto Ibeji or Flani foto (1978) Mopti

Silver print, 12.5cm x 9cm (5" x 3½")

Private collection

14 Tidjani Shitou

Portrait of Abdoulai Rassid Shitou (1974) Mopti

Silver print, 15.5cm x 21cm (6" x 8¼")

Private collection

15 Ibrahim Sanlé Sory

Foto Woon (1990) Bobo Dioulasso

Silver print, 9cm x 12.5cm (3½" x 5")

Private collection

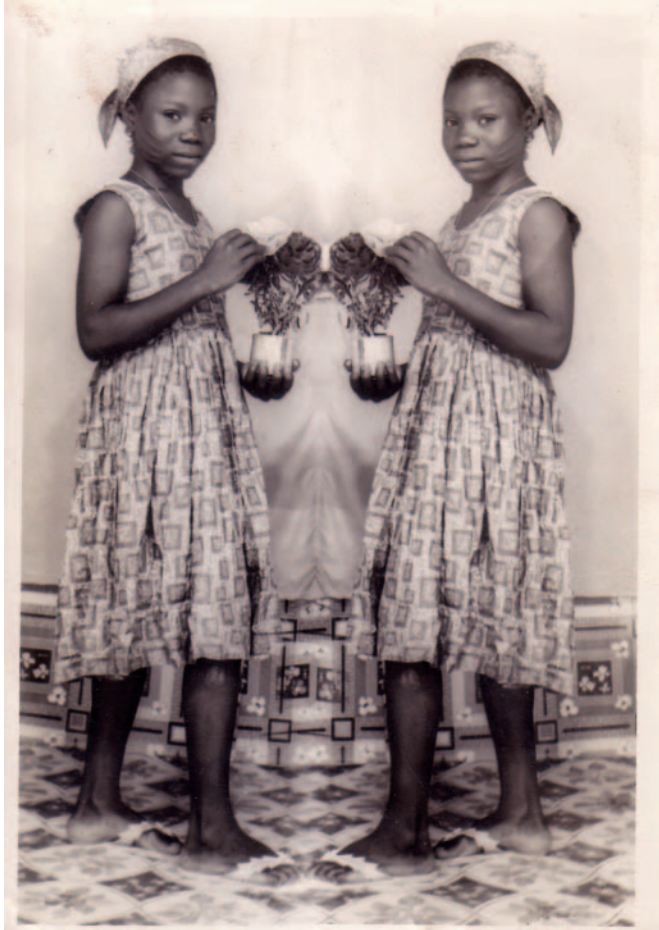
16 Ibrahim Sanlé Sory

Foto Woon (1985) Bobo Dioulasso

Silver print, 18cm x 24cm (7" x 9½")

Private collection

ent paper, but I may nevertheless mention *senankuya*, a relationship in the Mali languages between two populations, like Bozo and Dogon, or between two families, like the Koulibali and the Keita. The *senânku* is a kind of twin to any individual belonging to the other group; he has in him a portion of his partner, and vice versa (Dieterlen 1988: 97). More specifically we must notice the special case of *māgu*, 'parent à plaisanterie' (Fig. 5), a cathartic ally or relation (Dieterlen 1973:212). In Mali as well as Burkina Faso, two boys circumcised at the same time, even if they are not the same age (Fig. 6), are considered *flâ* and will be friends or *flani* (twins) all their lives (Dieterlen 1988:204). The same relationship can be observed in other countries between two communicants who want to look like twins (Fig. 3 from Benin, Fig. 45 from Burkina Faso). A commercial relationship may be seen as a twinship among Dogon people: The man who sells and the man who buys are considered as twins (Griaule 1966:201). Among the Bobo in Burkina Faso, the two children of two co-wives born at the same time or with very short time interval are considered twins (Le Moal 1973:200), and the same holds true in Mali (Fig. 7). The Drewals note, after R.F. Thompson, the virtue of comradeship in the pairing of Yoruba's Gelede masqueraders (Drewal and Drewal 1983:134-6). They write: "When two partners make a pact and adopt a common secret name, they often choose to dress alike and may be mistaken for twins" (ibid., p. 136). It should also be noted that throughout this area, *badenya* or brotherly love describes a twin-like intimacy between two individuals as if they were born to the same mother (*ba*, 'mother' + *ny*, 'child'; Figs. 2, 8-9, 21). Although the term comes from countries that share Manding traditions (Mali and Burkina), it is understood and used today by people in French-speaking countries (Benin and Togo). Finally, M. Cartry (1973:29) and P.M.





(counterclockwise from top left)
17 Michel Houkanrin
Self-portrait or Foto Hohovi (2005) Cotonou
 Numeric print
 Collection of the artist

18 Koda C. Labara
Untitled (2002) Lomé
 Color print, 14.5cm x 10.5cm (5¾" x 4⅛")
 Private collection

19 Koda C. Labara
Foto Venavi (2002) Lomé
 Color print, 10.5cm x 14.5cm (4⅛" x 5¾")
 Private collection

Peek (this issue) observe that the idea of twinship transcends the field of twins themselves in West Africa. For Cartry, even a person born single participates in a twin-type structure. The structure of social institutions (trade, some relationships, initiations) and the world structure are themselves based on this model. For Peek, twinness is often the intended representation in images termed couples, pairs, doubles, or dyads in African arts.

In the paired-figure portraits, studio clients want to be seen with their alter ego, their "second self," in a twin-like relationship. A male and female couple dressed similarly could endanger the differentiation of the sexes. Thus it is usually people of the same sex who are paired, both for social reasons (decency) and symbolic ones (linking and belonging). Their identical clothes—made from the same fabric—signify that the sitters are also cut from the same cloth. As for photographers, they produce images providing a plastic counterpart to the relation between the two individuals. By organizing the figures according to symmetric composition and rhetorics of poses which juxtapose or combine them, leading to fusion or even confusion, they achieve disturbing likenesses. The construction of these doubles involves all the conventions and techniques of studio photography: *boubous* and traditional dress (lent by the studio when customers do not possess identical clothes),² similar props and accessories settled to signify the axis of symmetry (Figs. 10–12) and, more effectively, conventional and geometrical composition which produce flat images that lack spatial depth but are not without semantic depth. This flatness is increased by resorting to specific poses in which the hieratism of the figures standing side by side, their bodily postures reduced to graphic signs along with lighting that smoothly harmonizes the whole scene, generates a sense of formal balance, restrained energy, and rhythm within stability. All



20 Ibrahim Sanlé Sory
Foto Woin (1977) Bobo Dioulasso
Silver print, 18cm x 24cm (7" x 9½")
Private collection

(top)

21 Ibrahim Sanlé Sory
Two sisters (1987) Bobo Dioulasso
B&W negative film, 6cm x 6cm (2½" x 2½")
Collection of the artist

(below, l-r)

22 Alé Inoussa
Untitled (1978) Porto Novo
Silver print, 8.7cm x 13.5cm (3½" x 5½")
Private collection

23 Aly Maïga
Twinned Portrait (2002) Bamako
9cm x 14cm (3½" x 5½")
Private collection

24 Ibrahim Sanlé Sory
Untitled (1985) Bobo Dioulasso
B&W negative film, 6cm x 6cm (2½" x 2½")
Collection of the artist

(opposite, l-r)

25 Ibrahim Sanlé Sory
Foto Woon or Flani foto (1978) Bobo Dioulasso
Silver print, 18cm x 24cm (7" x 9½")
Private collection

26 Tidjian Shitou
Two Sisters (1987) Mopti
B&W negative film, 6cm x 6cm (2½" x 2½")
Collection of the artist





these elements contribute to compose icon-like images, which may have indexical value, but for sitters who are sensitive to the play on resemblance and illusion, symbolic dimension and reference to other images, it is mainly wish fulfilment. The double thus achieved is sometimes so ambiguous that it may be difficult to differentiate a portrait of twins (Fig. 1) from a portrait of two friends (Figs. 2, 21, 26), or a portrait of two friends (Fig. 22) from a mirror portrait or a duplicated portrait (Figs. 18, 23), or even a paired-figure portrait from a duplicated portrait (Figs. 24–25) or a double-exposure (Figs. 19–20, 26–27). The photographer's intention and the sitters' desires come together to produce the illusion, reached in every kind of portrait, by using identical poses and symmetrical attitudes. The reality of the photographic world becomes a substitute for the real world, setting up the limits of an aesthetic universe within the picture frame.

The customers ask sometimes for double-exposure and duplicated portraits in order to mark a life event, like a birthday, an anniversary, a school success, a professional or a commercial success. But usually the circumstances that lead the clients to the studio and make them ask for double-exposure and duplicated portraits is the mere desire for a beautiful and different portrait. Nevertheless, all kinds of double portraits will join the family album or will be sent to friends. They are intended for a private use, although they appear in a public area when exhibited on the studio's outside wall, on the wooden display, or in the windows, and so are observed and commented on by everyone passing by. In the course of studying double-exposure and duplicated portraits, hearing them called "twin portraits" does not come as a surprise. Examples abound: *flani foto* in Mali and Burkina Faso (Figs. 13, 40), *kinkirsi foto* (Fig. 41) and *foto woin* (Figs. 15, 25) in Burkina Faso, *foto venavi* (Fig. 19) in Togo, *foto hohovi* in Benin (Figs. 17, 39) and *foto ibeji* (Fig. 13) in Mali and in Benin (among

Yoruba-speaking people). Ostensibly, they show two facets of the same person in a formal and visual sense. But in reality, they reveal a twin absent from this world (a twin invisible in the tangible world). The absent twin's image becomes a person's second facet in the visual world of photography. Conjured up by photography and its specific artifices (playing with presumed reality and creating illusions), the missing twin thereby appears in the mirror, and the photograph becomes compelling evidence of what used to be and an icon arbitrarily formed within both the studio's space and the darkroom's photo lab. Techniques of double-exposure during shooting or duplication during developing enable the photographer to compose a formal and symmetrical picture. He may also sometimes introduce an element of dissimilarity in the composition, hence producing a discrepancy out of which the twin illusion can emerge, to such an extent that it is eventually impossible to determine which figure is the original and which is the duplicated one. For many clients, completion of the self implies the presence of one's twin: a living person like a friend or a family member felt as a twin (the one I have described in the paired-figure portraits), or a missing twin they feel inside themselves and who is part of the definition of the "person." This belief is attested by numerous studies on notions of "the individual" carried out in West Africa: "dual nature is the condition of completeness" (Mercier 1999:232); even a unique child has a twin in the other world (Bonnet 1982:426); placenta (Dieterlen 1981:222) and totemic double (Thomas 1973:392) are the missing twin.³ Living in a parallel spirit world, whether missing or imaginary, the twin is "a double inside" who needs to be figured by the photo-portrait, which restores the intimate dimension and vision of self without being suspected of invention. This is because photography, as a modern means of showing oneself—as an index and an icon (Krauss 1990:142–3)—can play with likelihood and reality.



27 Ibrahim Sanlé Sory
Untitled, Bobo Dioulasso
 12.7cm x 17.7cm (5" x 7")
 Private collection

IMAGES AT THE ORIGIN OF DOUBLE PORTRAITS

Stemming from portrait painting—such as the anonymous *The Cholmondeley Ladies* (c. 1600–1610) in London’s Tate Gallery, portraying identical Tudor women side by side in bed holding their identical babies—the paired-figure portrait motif makes an early appearance in the history of studio photography. It responds to a desire to show family resemblance, whether real or fantasized, in which resemblance comes from impregnation, closeness, or juxtaposition (Figs. 28–30). The duplicated and mirror portrait motifs have been a part of studio activity and artistic research since the invention of photography. Studio photographic fancies were very popular both in Europe and the United States throughout the nineteenth and up to the beginning of the twentieth century. The historian Clément Chéroux notes the profusion of such photographic games, in which, “through extensive use of double exposure over black backdrops, twins and look-alikes multiplied. Moreover, double or triple exposure provided the opportunity to penetrate the world of mythology” (1999:36).

The earliest extant examples date back to Hippolyte Bayard’s self-portraits, in particular two *Standing Double Autoportraits* from around 1860, and later a large number of similar pictures were produced in Europe and the United States (Bajac, Canguilhem, et al. 2005:95). We should keep in mind that these pictures belonged to a cultural movement which held the belief that everyone had a double: “Every Man His Own Twin!” boasted one advertisement (American Museum of Photography 2003). Notions of the doppelgänger, essentially drawn from literature, of “Je est un autre” (Rimbaud 1972:249), or of an existing clone, were materialized through photography (Figs. 31–32). Perceived as humorous or disturbing make-believes, these doubles made their appearance in photographic studios as the artifacts of self-staging and photography’s powers. Mirror portraits also gave artists and studio photographers the opportunity to question the notions of alter ego and duplication—some examples include the famous Marcel Duchamp *Portrait in Mirrors*, made at the Coney Island Luna Park in 1917, and Cecil Beaton’s numerous *Mirror Portraits* at the London National Portrait Gallery. Mirror portraits were produced to such an extent that they and duplicated

The twin images produced by double portraits (considered to be lucky charms) are regarded as beautiful because they feature an idealized and harmonious relationship with one’s self or one’s Other. Devised in the studio’s intimate space, where dreams and illusions are composed, these lifelike pictures take shape not through mimesis but because of their fidelity to a mental image. Moreover, the dynamic dimension induced by doubles, coupled to a rhythm generated by the replication of (even motionless) figures, is bound to provide visual pleasure. It should also be noted that whereas creating photographic doubles remains a game for some photographers, for others, it represents an artistic strategy and a means to initiate thinking about representation and demiurgic power. In choosing stereotypical patterns conveying the same conceptual models prevalent in other West African countries,⁴ the sitters are guaranteed to be understood when their portraits are viewed or used. As for the skill exhibited by photographers, it stimulates business and demonstrates their talent. Some of them even pretend to have invented the processes and techniques used, but overall, photographers simply want to prove that they know the conventions of double portraiture and are able to follow and develop them. Replication and repetition of these patterns, which may include subtle changes, are not a lack of inventiveness but an artistic strategy that should be viewed as analogous to the use of replication in sculpture.



28 J. Planus
Untitled (c. 1900) Lyon
 Coal print, 16cm x 10.5cm (6½" x 4½")
 Private collection



29 Cie Américaine
Untitled (c. 1910), Lyon,
 10.5cm x 16.5cm (4½" x 6½")
 Private collection



30 Anonymous
Gold Dust Twin (written with a pen) (c. 1910)
 US postcard, 8.7cm x 14.7cm (3½" x 5¾")
 Private collection



31 A.S. Adams
Untitled (c. 1885) Kingston, C.W.
 6.3cm x 10.2cm (2½" x 4")
 Private collection

32 Anonymous
A Horseless Wagon (c. 1900)
 US postcard, 14cm x 8.7cm (5½" x 3½")
 Private collection

33 Anonymous
Jean-Michel Sapin (1968) Lyon
 10cm x 15cm (4" x 6")
 Private collection





34 Bate Dembele
Self-portrait (2000) Ségou
 Color print, 10cm x 15cm
 (4" x 6")
 Private collection

portraits became standards, which were commercialized up until the 1970s in France (Fig. 33). They still recur periodically in advertising today. Many twentieth century artists, from avant-gardists to surrealists, developed a deep interest in these portraits. These include representatives of “plastician photography” such as Hein-Khun Oh (b. 1963, Seoul) and Jeff Wall (b. 1946, Canada). Oh’s *Actor’s School* (2005),⁵ presents three “copies” of a girl against a city skyline, while another of his duplicated portraits is similar to one by African studio photographer Bate Dembele (Fig. 34), using vegetal backdrops with the same artistic intention. Wall’s transparency in lightbox *Double Self Portrait* (1979), at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, likewise questions the notion of representation through the double or mirror, as Henri Matisse, René Magritte, and many others had through the medium of painting.

Such innovating and surprising techniques were probably introduced to Africa by Western photographers, and some motifs were diffused by missionary and colonial postcards (Figs. 35–36), which were a very popular and widespread medium from the end of the nineteenth century up to the 1950s (Lamunière 2001:22, Geary 2002:103). They certainly reached the coasts of Liberia and Sierra Leone, which were the chosen lands of the Maroons and freed American slaves in the second half of the nineteenth century (Vidit Ward 1999:36, who points to the concurrent introduction of “modern technology and latest photographic styles”), and also reached the coasts of Benin and Nigeria when Afro-Brazilian Yoruba returned home. The first generation of French-speaking African photographers

received photographic training in French professional studios implanted in Africa or in France itself, as soldiers, or through apprenticeship. During the post-independence years, the next generation, opened to modernity and to the flow of images, adopted Western fashions. These photographers developed an interest in photo magazines and in camera instruction manuals (Fig. 37)—the Cokin manual (Cokin 1978) was used by some photographers I met in each country, from older practitioners such as Sory Sanlé (in Bobo Dioulasso, Burkina Faso) to younger ones, especially Koda C. Labara (in Lomé, Togo)—as well as in other media such as cinema and advertising, which flourished in the 1970s and in which doubles were more and more frequently seen. Photographer Sory Sanlé was trained by Yoruba photographers transiting through Bobo Dioulasso and studied French manuals about techniques of trick photography (Fig. 38) such as the well-known Pierre Monier’s *Photo trucs* (1982), which explained techniques for the reproduction of images. Michel Hounkanrin has travelled in Europe, received training in Nigeria, and learned much from the media. Yoruba photographer Tidiani Shitou often travelled across West Africa seeking contact with Westerners and African colleagues. Since the pictures were circulated between Africa and the other continents, this suggests that the portrait conventions used in them originated both outside and inside Africa, where they were adapted and reappropriated to fit in with local tastes. Yoruba photography is a good example of this process.

The Yoruba (who live mainly in Nigeria) provide an interesting case study for several reasons. They started practising photogra-



35 A. Albaret
French Guinea Conakry, Soussons Type (c. 1900–1915)
Postcard, 9cm x 14cm (3½" x 5½")
Private collection

36 Anonymous
Wives and Son of a Oulof Merchant, A. Nioro, Sudan (c. 1900–1915)
Postcard, 9cm x 14cm (3½" x 5½")
Private collection

37 Double exposure, in Cokin 1978:56 (Italian version) belonging to photographer C. Labara Koda, 2005, Lome. Photograph taken by the author

38 Pierre Monier
Double exposure (1982)
Collection of the artist, in Monier 1982:



phy at an early stage and combined the formal qualities of Victorian-style pictures with their own sculptural aesthetics, which can be perceived in the hieratic poses and symmetrical composition found in these photographs (Sprague 1978:107).⁶ In the 1970s, and perhaps earlier, they used photography in the *ibejì* cult of deceased twins, assuming that duplicated portraits could fulfil the same function as ritual figures, as noted by Marilyn Houlberg:

A recent development in Ila-orangun, Igbomina, is the use of photographs to represent deceased twins. The use of the photograph as such an active link with the spirit world is unprecedented in the history of photography as far as I know, and certainly warrants further study (Houlberg 1973:27).

Yoruba photographers were traders and tireless travellers and many of them emigrated to different countries. They opened professional studios and trained other photographers. They popular-

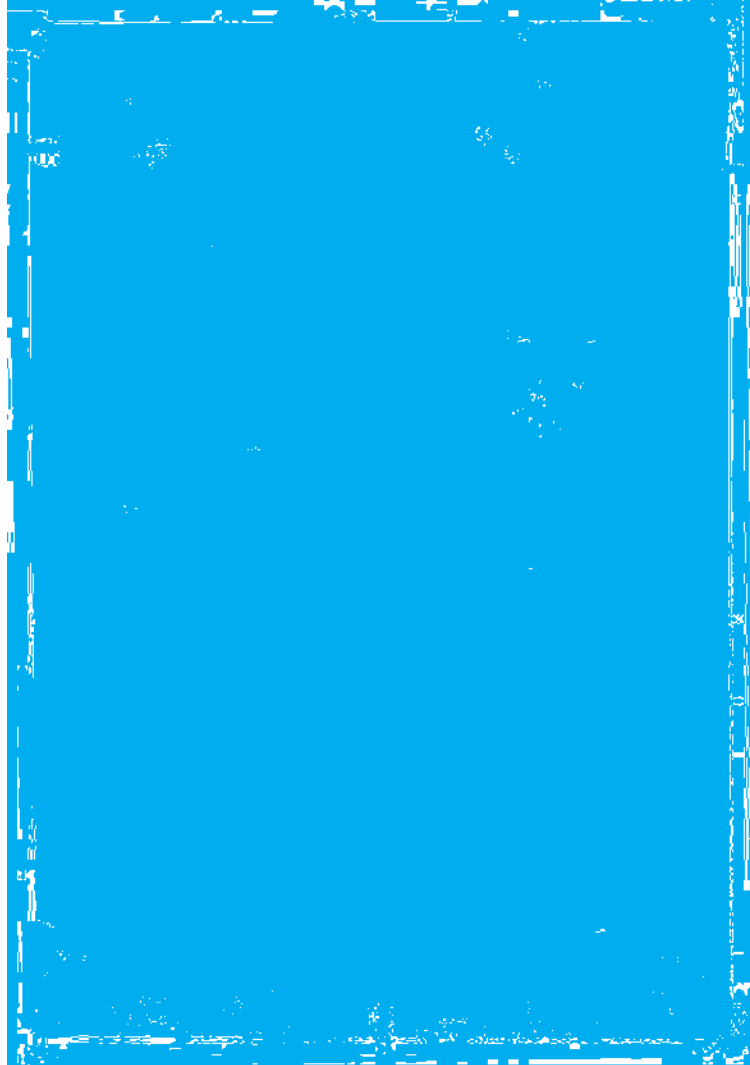
ized duplicated portraits or *foto ibejì*, and in so doing changed a cult use into a secular one (Figs. 13, 17, 39–41). Erika Nimis indicates that in the 1970s, “these photographic curios were emulated in all the countries hosting Yoruba photographers” (2003:171).

Many other photographers besides the Yoruba borrowed aesthetic forms from sculpture or other arts. A survey of West African arts might well demonstrate that some formal poses are inherited from sculpture tradition, such as sculptures representing his ancestors as a twin couple commissioned by King Behanzin of Dahomey (1844–1906), some Dogon figures (Mali), to Yoruba and Nago sculptures of mothers of twins (Benin), Lobi bateba (Burkina) as well as Bambara, Ewe, Fon, and Yoruba twin figurines. For instance, in double portraits produced by the first West African studios, the composed and well-balanced figures, standing or sitting with their hands resting on their knees, clearly establish a link between photographic portraits and artis-



39 Lambert Correa
Twinned Portrait or foto hohovi (2004) Cotonou
B&W print, 9cm x 14cm (3½" x 5½")
Private collection

40 Sory Sanlé
Foto woin or flani foto (1984) Bobo Dioulasso
Silver print, 12.5cm x 18cm (5" x 7")
Private collection



tic expressions which preceded them. The former are linked to the latter through a formal legacy, while both have their roots in twin imagery. The circulation of ideas and cultures points to multiple sources of inspiration and therefore suggests syncretism. Such a process entails a reflection upon the underlying reasons and necessities which encouraged acceptance and use of double portraits.

TWINNESS AS A SOURCE OF COLLECTIVE IMAGERY

Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rate of twinning in the world (Pison 1988:250). Feared and honored in the several populations of these four countries, twins are associated with a multitude of rituals that are still practised today. Twin birth has different meanings for each population, but as expressions of power and danger, they often echo the origin and order of the world. And in the countries concerned here, this order is perceived as an unstable and unbalanced binary system of same and opposites in which twinning plays a fundamental role, either because the creator gods are twins, or because twins are protected by the gods (see both Peek and Lawal, this issue). Hence the pervasiveness of such a paradigm in many rituals and practices, which create their own cultural items (now considered artworks by many) and produce objects such as double portraits in photography.

Owing to its paradoxical aspect, twinship generates a collective imagery (in the sense of a set of visible and invisible images). Twin imagery relates to mythical, religious, and historical narratives that have all formed images which still awaken mistrust, awe, and respect. Nevertheless, twin imagery also left visual traces imbued with beauty and protection, which continue to permeate artistic, cultural, social, and family life, down to the most ordinary routine. Twins' images are now positively connoted in modern societies. Traditional and mythical African meanings of twins do not compete with religions (Christianity and Islam) or cultures adopted from Western countries. Opened to different forms of adoption and syncretism, people I observed and spoke with in these four countries often give two names to their twins: a Catholic one referring to the Bible or a Muslim one referring to the Koran, and a local name referring to the ancient African culture. They can also believe in two different religions (an ancient African one and a recent African one—Islam is a very old religion for Malian people) without seeing any conflict between them, indeed finding connections, especially concerning twins: twins are very important, appear in every religious history, are protected by Gods, are God's signs, and have special powers. And particularly they accept two different ways of representing twin images: through traditional statuettes derived from



41 Laurent Yameogo
Portrait of Youssouf Ouedraogo with his "Twin Brother" (1976)
Ouagadugu
Silver print, 18cm x 24cm (7" x 9½")
Collection of Youssouf Ouedraogo

41a Youssouf Ouedraogo and Laurent Yameogo (b. 1951), "Studio Royal Photo," holding a duplicated portrait like *kinkirsi* (twins), 2006, Ouagadugu. Photograph the by author

very old, local traditions and through photography coming from Western cultures. Some examples prove that people are aware of mixed practices, which create a modern way of living. Pierre Verger, for instance, noticed and photographed ceremonies dedicated to the saints Cosma and Damian, which were syncretized with the Ibeji cult by Afro-Brazilian Yoruba and Fon who had returned to Benin (Verger 1995:388).⁷ In Porto Novo, I met a Christian family who had a voodoo shrine dedicated to twins in the yard of their compound and named their twin sons Cosma and Damian (Fig. 42). In Timbuktu, the Djingareiber mosque (built 1325–1330, with architectural elements evoking twinning) is highly frequented, for it houses the tombs of twin saints named Allassan and Alousseini. They are 2 of the 333 Muslims saints of this old, holy university city. They are honored and respected by many Muslim travellers and Koran scholars coming from Mali, as well as the neighboring countries, and especially by all the Tuareg people. Allassan and Alousseini are supposed to resolve problems and bring happiness because they are twins, and because this twinship recalls Hassan and Hussain, the Prophet Ali's sons, who are considered twins by Muslim people all over West Africa. Some very popular male twin names not only name (as all names usually do in West Africa), they also describe the person with a condensed and symbolic sentence. For Christian

people living in southern countries (Benin and Togo) Cosma and Damian (also Jacob and Esau) and for Muslims living more frequently in northern countries (Mali and Burkina Faso) Hassan and Hussain are obvious references to the monotheist religions' great twin saints. So are Awa and Adama for female Muslim twins, referring to Adam and Eve seen as the twin couple at the origins of the world. In Bobo Dioulasso, Honoré Badjo, who is Catholic, showed me the Bihionna protector statue (Fig. 43) commissioned by his father and his father's twin, who happened to live apart, and which represented the two brothers united. Such a representation is not far from those of joined bodies featured in double portraits.

From Burkina Faso to Mali, it is not rare to see Muslim children who, even though they are not actual twins (siblings or companions), beg as twins usually do at cross roads, bus stations, and in front of the mosques (Fig. 44). They present this twin-like image because they are very attracted by the vision of themselves as twins and because they will be able to give and receive a blessing. In Bobo Dioulasso, I met two non-twin sisters who are expected by their family to reenact a beautiful and ideal twinship; by replacing the "missing twinship" resulting from the death of their brother, disruption of both family and social order will be avoided (Fig. 45). In Ouagadugu, photographer Joseph



Ouedraogo (PhotoVideo Neb-Nooma) offered me a picture of his “twin daughters” taken during their First Communion (Fig. 46). The two girls in the picture are in fact his daughter Karine and her younger friend Pascaline, who were brought up together as twins—and regularly photographed as such, which contributed to build their twin-like relation. Joseph Ouedraogo has two sons named Gilles and Constant, but he also calls them Gueswen and Wenpuire, for the full name/phrase *Gueswenpuire* means “Look, this is God’s share”⁸—in other words, they are the God’s sign of a unique soul divided in two bodies. The cut phrase exacerbates its own sense: *wen* is the common syllable, for the link, for a good balance, and for the beauty of each name. In his studio, Lambert Correa (Joslam Studio Video), a devout Catholic living in Cotonou, has on permanent display the photograph of two statuettes (*ahovi*, Fig. 47) representing his deceased twin daughters Rose and Rosine, next to a *foto hohovi* (Fig. 39) he made for a customer. When Egypt and Libya opened the African Cup of Nations on January 20, 2006, the match was refereed by the famous Burkinabe twin referees Lassana and Housseini Pare (variations on the names Hassan and Hussein), who were invited in order to bring good luck to the football competition. In Mali, an advertisement for Lobo tea is perceived as a portrait of twins, which is meant to symbolize friendliness and harmony (Fig. 48). In a Burkinabe schoolbook, twin imagery (Fig. 49) very similar to duplicated portraits (Fig. 15) is used to illustrate lessons on time scales. Several studios in Mali are named “Jumeaux Color”, thus placing them under the protection of twins (Fig. 50).

The imagery described here, which derives from myths, religious beliefs, or mundane aspects of life, generates many flattering images, which are demanded as examples and models whenever self-exhibition of one or two persons in photographs is at stake. In both cases, these portraits reconstruct twinness in summoning up an actual twin (different from oneself and per-



(opposite page, counterclockwise from top left)

42 Zounon Kanho's family twin shrine, 2005, Porto Novo. Photograph by the author

43 Honoré Badjo and Statue Bihionna representing Badjo Kambou and his twin brother Badjo Kambou Naba, 2005, Bobo Dioulasso. Photograph by the author

44 "True and false twins" in Bamako streets, 2004. Photograph by the author

45 Anata (14, left), younger sister Awa (11, right) and friend Awa (11, center), 2006, Bobo Dioulasso. Photograph by the author. Awa at the right had a twin brother, Allasan, who is dead, so she and her older sister Anata are regarded, dressed, and brought up by their parents as if they were twin sisters. Awa regards the little girl Awa (in the center) as her other twin sister (and vice versa) for they have the same name, and they are very close and of the same age, but belong to different families.

(this page, top to bottom)

46 Joseph Ouedraogo
My Twin Daughters as Communicants (1999) Ouagadugu

Color print, 12.5cm x 9cm (5" x 3½")

Private collection

Daughter Karine (b. 1988) and her friend Pascaline (b. 1987) were brought up as twin sisters.

47 Lambert Correa
My Deceased Twin Daughters Roseline and Rosie in 1978 (2004), Ewé statuette, Cotonou
Color print, 10cm x 15cm (6" x 4")
Private collection



ceived in the Other) or an absent, invisible one (but present within oneself and conjured up in the picture). Twinness, as a reflection of the logic of the world and existence, embodies an in-between of merged identities (the same and the other) which is essential to achieve oneness. As stereotypes, they are a reflection of cosmogonic myths, a reflection of the world order made of tensions and conflicts, and echo the sacred within the secular. The pictures produced are considered beautiful by their viewers, for they correspond to usage and fulfil aesthetic expectations. As Michel Houankanrin says: "When I make a double portrait, people think they are looking at a twin portrait. They are not really surprised because they know a lot of twins, and find them attractive-looking."⁹ People do not have to be twins to feel or to look like twins and to be seen as twins. Since they resort to shared codes and memory across numerous countries, twin portraits in photography are known, recognized, and understood by all.



(clockwise from top left)

48 Advertisement for Lobo tea in Mopti, 2003. Photograph by the author

49 History book, 2d year of primary school, Ministry of Education, Ouagadougou, 1991, p. 21.

50 Photo studio, Jumeaux Color, 2006, Bamako. Photograph by the author.



7. La dizaine d'années

COMMENT MESURER
LE TEMPS ?

Observons et découvrons

A. Autour de nous

- Qui, dans la classe, a été inscrit au CP1 quand il avait 8 ans ? Quel âge as-tu cette année, si tu n'as jamais redoublé ?
- D'un élève âgé de 10 ans, on dit aussi qu'il est âgé d'une dizaine d'années.
- Nous sommes en 1991. Balla, en quelle année es-tu né ? Balla, qui est né en 1981, a donc 10 ans. Il est âgé d'une dizaine d'années. Qui encore dans la classe a 10 ans ?
- Celui qui a 30 ans est âgé de trois dizaines d'années.
- Pour les événements qui se sont passés il y a 9 ou 11 ans, on peut dire aussi qu'ils sont vieux d'environ une dizaine d'années.

B. Les images



Fig. 1. Voici Poko et Pogbi, deux sœurs jumelles ; elles sont photographiées peu de temps après leur naissance, en 1971.

Fig. 2. Aujourd'hui, en 1991, Poko et Pogbi sont devenues grandes. Elles sont âgées de 20 ans chacune.

Leur grande sœur s'est mariée il y a 10 ans. Quel âge avaient les jumelles au moment du mariage ?

As ordinary studio portraits or souvenir-photos, double portraits are not windows opening onto the outside world but frames within which an imaginary world may be devised. They result from the merging of reappropriated techniques and local customs. They achieve synthesis by offering a modern conception of the individual which makes playful use of photography's trickery through twin figuration while remaining faithful to the notion of the individual and incorporate twin patterns into contemporary forms. Thanks to these modern forms people invent and control

their own image. Therefore, they are at the core of both twinness and photography and consequently have a rightful place within the history of African artistic productions.

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Notes

This paper is based on my doctoral thesis in progress, *Doubles and Twins: A New Approach to Contemporary Studio Photography in West Africa*. I would like to thank the photographers for opening their studios to me, and Philip M. Peek and Leslie Ellen Jones for their assistance in bringing this essay to its published form.

1 Surveys were carried out in nineteen cities of various sizes: Bamako, Segou, San, Djenné, Mopti, and Tombouctou in Mali; Bobo Dioulasso, Boromo, and Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso; Cotonou, Porto Novo, Pobe, Abomey, Ouidah, Cotonou, and Grand Popo in Benin; and Lomé, Aného, and Atakpame in Togo.

2 Two friends of mine (friends and first cousins themselves) experienced it for me. Because they were not well enough dressed, the photographer Ibrahim Shitou, Tidiani Shitou's son, feeling the closeness, spontaneously lent them two full costumes called "Uniforme" in order to create a twin-like image (Fig. 12).

3 I will not develop the notion of the "person's double" here: the person's image, shadow, or reflexion which is captured by photography. Through photography, individuals construct their identities, both single and multiple, and do not only aim at expressing twinning. This ever-changing identity is composed of different strata, like a palimpsest, combining tradition and modernity, collective and private history. Different aspects of the "person" are given in Cartry 1973, Dieterlen 1973, Le Moal 1973, and Marie 1997.

4 These models have been noticed as stereotypes in Gambia (Buckley 2000–2001:84), Côte d'Ivoire (Werner 1996:103), Ghana (Wendl 1998:152), of course in Nigeria (Sprague 1978:59; Nimis 2005:168), but in RDC too (Fall 1996:33).

5 From the series *Girl's Act*: <http://heinkuhnloh.com/highschoolgirls/>

6 Sprague published one of the first *ibebi* photo-portraits in this article: an anonymous late twentieth century photograph now in the collection of the University of Arizona (1978:56).

7 See also www.pierreverger.org/fr/photos/photos_themtree.php.

8 Interview with J. Ouedraogo, Photo Video Neb-Nooma, Ouagadougou, January 2006.

9 Interview with M. Hounkanrin, Zoom Photo Service, Cotonou, January 2005.

10 www.abawe.com/fr/butinage/creation_579_2.htm

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